

LEAVE THE HIGHWAY BEHIND

Off-highway vehicle enthusiasts from Reno and Northern California are finding new places to explore away from the crowds on public lands in northwest Nevada. Few people and wide open spaces make great places to ride, just ask the people who live in Winnemucca, where many of the residents have all terrain vehicles (ATVs) and dirt bikes.

That is the opportunity now, but like every other BLM field office in Nevada, Winnemucca is experiencing a marked increase in casual OHV use and has received more applications for organized OHV events over the past few years. Organized OHV events are typically long distance desert motorcycle races. Each event draws nearly 200 racers and 500 spectators.

No wonder recreationists are drawn to Winnemucca, where the BLM manages 8,300,000 acres of public lands, an area larger than the states of Massachusetts and Connecticut combined, and less than 25,000 people live within its boundaries. Even when wilderness and wilderness study area acreages that are closed to OHV uses are deducted, there are still about 7,200,000 acres in the District that are open to OHV use. Seven million, two-hundred thousand acres is about the size of Maryland and Delaware together—that's a lot of room to roam!

Four wheeling and riding ATVs, dirt bikes, sand rails and dune buggies are all the rage at the Winnemucca Sand Dunes. More than 175 campers enjoyed the dunes over the Memorial Day weekend last year. BLM anticipates OHV use in the sand dunes area to double each year for the foreseeable future. The east end of the dunes is about seven miles north of Winnemucca off U.S. Highway

95. The dunes cover about 60 square miles, but management is complicated by a checkerboard land ownership where blocks of privately owned lands are interspersed with public land in a pattern similar to the red and black blocks of a checkerboard.

Black Rock

Many opportunities await OHVs to explore the remote desert backcountry, emigrant trails, Black Rock Playa and hidden canyons tucked into the gigantic mountain landscape of the Black Rock-High Rock Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area (NCA). OHV use in the NCA is limited to designated routes in most areas, with the exception of the playa, which is open to OHV use.

There are more than 800 miles of designated motorized trails and roads to explore in the NCA and more than 100,000 acres of the playa is open to motorized use. The trails that follow the emigrant trails and that weave between and around wilderness areas offer excellent access to even some of the most remote parts of the NCA. Outstanding OHV opportunities for drivers with solid four-wheel drive skills can

be found on designated routes throughout the NCA. For novice drivers the vast, almost perfectly flat playa is ideal. The NCA offers a unique experience to explore an area that has not changed much since the days of the emigrant passage to Oregon and California in the 1840s and 50s.

The Black Rock NCA was designated in 2000

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OHV AREA USE DESIGNATIONS...

Off-road vehicle use is defined by three categories: open, limited and closed.

Open: area where all types of vehicle use is permitted at all times. About 80 percent, or nearly 40 million acres, of BLM managed public lands in Nevada are in this category.

Limited: area with some restrictions. Typically, limited will mean OHVs must stay off of existing or designated roads and trails. Some of the other limits to OHV use in this category are types of vehicles and time or season of vehicle use. Nearly 18 percent of BLM managed public lands in Nevada are in this category.

Closed: area where off-road vehicle use is prohibited. Only about 2 percent of BLM managed public land in Nevada are in this category.

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State Director's Comments



Recently, I had the opportunity to meet with other BLM state directors to discuss the issues each of us were facing in managing the public's land for multiple uses.

One thing we all agreed on was that managing for off-highway vehicles (OHVs) is becoming a major challenge. Before anyone jumps to the conclusion that BLM employees are biased against people using these vehicles, let me state emphatically that OHVs on the public lands are a legitimate mode of transportation when used responsibly. The increasing numbers of users are creating management challenges to say the least but it is the irresponsible manner in which some of these vehicles are being used that is creating resource management conflicts across the West.

The Motorcycle Industry Council/Specialty Vehicle Institute of America provided some recent numbers about OHVs that are impossible to ignore:

- Between 2001 and 2003, there was a 77 percent increase in OHVs in Nevada.
- West-wide the increase was 36 percent.
- If you go back a few years to 1998, the number of OHVs in Nevada soars to a 184 percent increase.

Nevada's public lands offer a vast amount of open space with few restrictions for OHV use. As the number of vehicles and riders increase, the need to implement management actions addressing this use also increases. Trail designation is necessary

in high-use areas and where important natural and historic resources are at risk from indiscriminate OHV use. A few areas may require closure to OHVs to protect resources. As BLM updates land use plans, we will be working with all concerned to identify appropriate routes and use areas, including those sites which can best accommodate intensive use.

One of my family's favorite recreational activities is driving our old Jeep Cherokee in the backcountry where we get to see some of Nevada's most remote and beautiful areas. As with many of you, my wife and I tend to stay on existing trails to avoid unnecessary damage to the sites we are visiting and to the vehicle we are driving. Unfortunately, resource conflicts can occur when too much use is concentrated in a few popular areas. Degradation also occurs when duplicative trails are created.

By listening to OHV'ers who are passionate in their pursuit to keep all public lands open and others who are just as concerned about eliminating environmental damage from this type of use, the BLM is getting a good idea of what opportunities can be offered on public lands to enhance each interest group's recreational experience. In general, most OHV enthusiasts are accepting of reasonable and consistent rules and regulations. BLM's obligation is to keep everyone informed about the requirements and the rationale for certain management goals, and to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas.

With the increasing numbers of OHVs on your public lands, the BLM is also seeing much more interest in holding competitive events. Our field offices in Nevada do not have the staff to address unplanned workloads associated with last minute applications for special use permits required for off-highway racing events. Nevertheless, we are working to meet as much of this demand as possible. One change we will be implement-

ing in all offices is to establish application deadlines so we can better plan our staff's time to deal with permitting workloads.

This edition of the Nevada Sage is focusing on OHV use on public lands; identifying the opportunities we have to provide for a quality and safe recreational experience while highlighting the challenges we all face in balancing this use with the need to protect sensitive resources. Improving our communications is a good way to begin. We need to have a common understanding of relevant issues so we can work together to address these issues.

OHV riders tell us they want loop and destination trails. Nevada's public lands have the potential to be one of the best places to ride OHVs in the country. The public lands have many roads and trails already existing through great scenery that offer challenges and fun for every ability.

Working with the public and in coordination with local communities, we hope to identify and then designate statewide trail systems, including OHV trails, which will meet the ever growing demand for a quality backcountry experience.

The BLM cannot ignore the irresponsible use occurring on your public lands regardless of which activity might be causing resource damage. Given the number of activities and demands being placed on these lands, we all have to do a better job of accepting responsibility for being the stewards of these resources. We must look not only at the situation today, but plan for future use as well.

BLM is committed to working with all segments of the public in continuing to provide opportunities for people to enjoy their public lands. We welcome your ideas.

-Bob Abbey

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to protect the scenic, natural and cultural resources of region. This designation was followed by management planning intended to allow for OHV opportunities while protecting area resources.

A wealth of information about the NCA is available and there are several interest groups that can help to enhance your experience in the area. For those people who are not comfortable with their skills or equipment, several groups, including some commercial operations, offer tours of the emigrant trails and other area attractions. BLM offices in Winnemucca, Cedarville and Reno can provide maps, travel information, routes and advisories. Check it out before heading out!

**-Barbara Keleher
David Lefevre
and Jamie Thompson**
Winnemucca Field Office



A Few Rules in the NCA

Vehicle travel off of designated motorized trails and roads is prohibited with the exceptions:

- *The flat surface of the playa is open to vehicle travel, but the small dunes that surround the playa are closed.*
- *To accommodate parking, camping and passage of vehicles on narrow roads including vehicle access routes serving wilderness, vehicles may pull off to the sides within 50 feet from the road edges where minimal damage is done to vegetation and new parallel roads are not created.*

High Rock Canyon is closed to vehicle travel during an annually determined date in April until the second weekend in May. Check with the Winnemucca Field Office if you plan to travel to High Rock Canyon during this time.

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Questions, comments and requests may be mailed to:

**Editor
BLM Office of Communications
P.O. Box 12000
Reno, NV 89520-0006**

**Email: jworley@nv.blm.gov
Office: 1340 Financial Blvd
Phone: 775-861-6515**

**Robert V. Abbey
State Director**

**Amy Lueders
Associate State Director**

**Jo Simpson
Chief, Communications**

**JoLynn Worley
Editor**

**Design by MeshCreative
www.meshcreative.com**

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Elko Looking to Develop OHV Trails

What started a few years ago as a simple idea to help diversify Elko County's economy has developed into a quarter-of-a-million dollar, multi-partnered project that continues to build on its successes.

The simple idea was to define a network of open roads and trails on public lands in northeastern Nevada to attract recreation enthusiasts.

"People in the community were concerned that Elko County was overly dependent on one sector of the economy—mining—which goes up and down," said Ralph McMullen, executive director of the Elko Convention and Visitors Authority. "We needed to explore other avenues to diversify. As we looked at our opportunities, it was apparent that the millions of acres of public land and thousands of miles of existing roads and trails could be a positive asset to our economy.

"People in western urban areas are looking for wide open spaces where they can drive their trucks, ride ATVs, ride mountain bikes, hike, ride horses, and basically just get away from it all," said McMullen. "The three things people want to see when they're out riding—beautiful scenery, wildlife, and historic sites—Elko County has in abundance on public lands."

The project has received a \$68,000 Simms Act grant from the Nevada Division of Parks, a local match of \$68,000, a \$20,000 grant from the U.S. Forest Service for rural promotions, a \$5,000 from the BLM, and an additional \$10,000 grant from the U.S. Forest Service for recreational trails.

Several more grants are being requested.

The partners have published a first-class brochure called Adventures on the Edge, which is part of a nation-wide advertising campaign. The brochure shows a wide range of trail rides and hikes in Elko County.

The Recreation Committee on the project is made up of 50 people who represent many local, state, and federal agencies, organizations and groups. The committee has worked with its federal partners from the start.

"The great thing about working with BLM," said McMullen, "is that as we identified routes and an environmental concern arose, the BLM staff could explain the concern reasonably, and they offered alternatives as well.

This turned potentially negative situations into positive ones."

Gil Hernandez, Elko Convention and Visitors Authority Board of Directors member and Chairman of the Recreation Committee, said the proof of the success is in the numbers.

"This year we're seeing motel occupancy rates and lodging tax revenues up at least 10 percent each month over the same period last year," said Hernandez.

The partnership, fueled by success, has defined a long-range vision to connect the northeast Nevada routes all the way to Ely and eventually identify a network of roads across the entire state.

—Mike Brown
Elko Field Office

Advisory Councils Give Guidance on OHV Use



PHOTO COURTESY OF STAN WHITE

BLM Nevada's three Resource Advisory Councils (RACs) tackled the issue of damage caused by off-highway vehicles on public lands by developing guidelines for the agency to consider in designating OHV use areas in land use plans.

Each RAC appointed members to a statewide subcommittee, which also included Forest Service, Nevada Association of Counties and State of Nevada Division of State Parks and Department of Wildlife representatives. The subcommittee's work resulted in guidelines based on promoting cooperation among user groups, sharing resources, and minimizing conflicts with other uses on the public lands.

The guidelines are consistent statewide and include key concepts such as:

- **Encourage OHV use on existing or designated road and trails, except in closed area, prior to**

land use plans being updated and road and trail inventories completed.

- **In land use plans or plan amendments, designate areas as open, limited, or closed to OHV use.**
- **Cooperatively develop/improve public outreach programs to promote trail etiquette, environmental ethics, and responsible-use stewardship ethic.**

The RACs represent three large portions of the state: the Northeast area, the Southern/Mojave area and the Northwest/Sierra Front. Members of these councils are appointed by the Secretary of the Interior and represent the wide range of interests in public land management.

The RACs developed guidelines for livestock grazing in 1996 and two of the RACs have also developed guidelines for managing wild horses and burros.

H A N D L I N G Off-Highway Riding and Part

The BLM Carson City Field Office manages more than 5.3 million acres of federal public land in 11 counties in western Nevada and eastern California. Most of these lands are wide open to off-highway vehicle (OHV) use. The area is criss-crossed by thousands of miles paved highways, dirt roads, and multiple-use trails. And these routes get used—a lot.

The field office's most popular recreation areas for OHV riding have something in common: they have a following of friends. Friends groups at Sand Mountain, Wilson Canyon and the Pine Nut Mountains have been helping the BLM to improve user responsibility as well as conserve the natural resources on which an OHV riding experience depends.

Sand Mountain

Sand Mountain is about 3.5 miles long, one mile wide and rises 600 feet above the valley floor east of Fallon. The largest single dune in the Great Basin, Sand Mountain is considered a sacred site by the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone. For decades, OHV riders, hikers, and now sand boarders have considered Sand Mountain a great place to recreate. But as visitation has expanded, with

as many as 6,000 people last Memorial Day weekend, so has the network of trails radiating from the main dunes and the amount of trash left behind.

The Friends of Sand Mountain are not bashful about their love of these special dunes; some of them have been riding there for three generations. They have been particularly helpful in cleaning up after users who flock to the dunes. When it became apparent that the increased use at Sand Mountain was negatively impacting at

least two species endemic to the area, the Friends began educating dune riders to avoid certain areas and keep on a system of routes through areas of habitat critical to the Sand Mountain blue butterfly and its host plant, the Kearney buckwheat.

It's sometimes a tough sell to folks not used to restrictions on OHVs, but through education and trail signing the impacts on vegetation can be reduced to avoid a federal listing of the butterfly as a threatened or endangered species.



Wilson Canyon

Wilson Canyon is bisected by the West Fork of the Walker River and Nevada State Route 208 near Yerington. The area is popular for camping, fishing, hiking, picnicking and riding OHVs. Most people who recreate at Wilson Canyon

are self-contained, since the site has very few facilities. The lack of amenities hasn't slowed use down. The natural resources of the area are being hammered, particularly along the river banks.

The challenge for BLM at Wilson Canyon is to keep streamside vegetation healthy and slow the erosion of dirt loosened by OHV tires that washes into the river. In cooperation with Lyon County officials and citizen groups, the BLM is fencing off the banks of the river to OHV use and camping. Walk in access to the river will

Partnerships Go Hand-in-Throttle

remain open to fish, picnic and enjoy other activities. OHV riding and camping are welcome in the area away from the river.

The Friends of Wilson Canyon co-founder Chuck Worley has a high level of initiative and stewardship. He was the driving force behind receiving a transportation funding grant aimed at managing OHV use in the canyon so that local opportunities stay available. The Friends also maintain an internet web site to inform visitors of the changes for OHV and camping use along the river.

Fossils exist on public lands in many locations in Nevada. BLM's multiple-use mandate makes it impractical to intensively manage all federal land to preserve the fossil record. However, the Ruhenstroth area south of Fish Springs Road in the southwestern portion of the range contains unique fossils that are an important slice of the paleontological history of the western Great Basin in Nevada.

There are at least 10 major paleontological zones within Ruhenstroth, and the potential to identify other sites within this Tertiary sedimentary horizon is high. Ancient animals that lived here during the Pliocene Era, roughly 2.5 million years ago, and whose fossil remains have been identified, include extinct species of camels and horses, mastodons, sloths, zebras, otters, wild dogs, and various small mammals and fish.

In the last 10 years an exponential increase in public motorized use of this area has created significant impacts to these fragile fossil resources. Soil erosion and OHV trails and play area expansion from churning, knobby-tread tires has exposed fossils that are being destroyed by direct contact and illegal collection.

Unmanaged OHV use was damaging the Ruhenstroth area. An emergency closure was made to limit riders to existing major roads through the 2,340 acre area, which is less than 1 percent of the public lands in the Pine Nuts.

Motorized recreation activities will be managed by directing riders to existing trails on the 99 percent of the Pine Nut Mountains still available for their use. Interpretive signs and materials will be placed around the area to aid in public education on how to protect fossil resources while

still enjoying the mountains. These efforts will remain in place until the Pine Nut Resource Management Plan Amendment is finalized. A draft of the amendment will be available for public comment this fall.

BLM has been working in the Ruhenstroth area with the Pine Nut Preservation League and the Pine Nut Trails Association to identify and mark trails important for recreational access. A series



People on hillside look at OHV-caused damage in the Ruhenstroth fossil area.

BLM PHOTO

Pine Nut Mountains

Pinyon pine and juniper trees cover the Pine Nut Mountain range which offers more than 400,000 acres of public land spread across three counties.

The Pine Nuts are a popular recreation destination for OHV riding, but the mountains also hold important resources in the ground—ancient mammal fossils.

(Off-Highway Riding and Partnerships Go Hand-in-Throttle, continued from page 7)

of public meetings were held in May to obtain public input on the OHV trails system and public forums continue. The draft amendment will divide the Pine Nuts into OHV areas according to three designations: open (cross-country travel allowed); limited (vehicles limited to designated or existing routes of travel); or closed (vehicle prohibited). The draft will include a map of area designations.

More information on this planning process can be obtained from Tom Crawford, Pine Nut plan coordinator, (775) 885-6169 or Tom_Crawford@nv.blm.gov.

-Mark Struble

Carson City Field Office



This Beats Book Learning

Sixth grade students from Austin and Battle Mountain grind seeds into flour using two rocks and clear ground to plant native seeds at the 14th annual Mill Creek Education Day hosted by the BLM Battle Mountain Field Office.

Nearly 100 students moved among seven stations learning about campfire safety, maps and compasses, birds of prey, weed identification and water purification as well as archaeology and native seed planting. A scavenger hunt had students finding an insect and drawing it, finding evidence of bird life

and finding evidence of human-caused tree damages among other things.

Teachers cooked and served a hot dog lunch provided by donations from the Owl Club, Midway Market and teachers and parents.

Mill Creek campground is south of Battle Mountain. No fees are charged for camping or day use.

-Diane Hendry

Battle Mountain Field Office

Tread Lightly! Tips for Responsible OHV Riding

Riding off-highway vehicles is a popular American activity that is now being enjoyed by a second generation of enthusiasts. As new riders discover the sport, they need to know that practicing good environmental stewardship will ensure that we'll continue to have places to ride.

Travel and recreate with minimum impact.

- Stay on established or designated trails and routes to reduce impacts to wildlife habitat.
- Avoid cutting switchbacks or taking shortcuts with an off-highway vehicle (OHV), "pioneering trails" destroys vegetation and causes others to use unauthorized routes.
- Use an OHV to retrieve downed game, or for emergencies, not to pursue game.

Respect the environment and the rights of others.

- Err on the side of caution around horses, hikers and bikers. Pull OHVs off to the side of the road or trail and let them pass.
- Honor all gates, fences and barriers that are there to protect natural resources, wildlife and livestock.
- Avoid blocking roads when parking your vehicle.

Educate yourself, plan and prepare before you go.

- Be sure to obtain permission to cross or use privately owned lands.
- Take an OHV safety course. Information on these courses is available at www.nohvcc.org/html/ohv_safety.htm

Allow for future use of the outdoors, leave it better than you found it.

- Avoid sensitive areas, such as streambanks, lake-shores and meadows.
- Carry out what you carry in. Don't burn or bury trash.
- Flagging and marking trails is unsightly. If flagging is necessary, remove it as you leave.

Discover the rewards of responsible recreation.

- Be an ambassador for your sport. Be as considerate to others as you would want them to be to you.
- Help preserve the beauty and inspiring attributes of the great outdoors for yourself and generations to come by enjoying your sport responsibly.

tread lightly![®]
LEAVING A GOOD IMPRESSION



TREES, TREES EVERYWHERE

Early National Public Lands Day Tree Planting Party

With the help of 42 volunteers, BLM's Elko Field Office celebrated National Public Lands Day about five months early. The project involved planting 70, six-foot tall, narrow leaf cottonwood trees along the South Fork of the Humboldt River between the reservoir dam and upstream of Dixie Creek.

Planting the trees in May gives them a better chance of survival than if they were planted on the traditional NPLD date in late September. The Elko County Chapter of the Back Country Horsemen packed the trees and materials on their horses and forded the river. Boats were used as well to get trees and equipment across the river. The trees were fenced to protect them from beavers. The trees will help stabilize the river banks and provide shade to keep water temperatures cooler for trout.

After planting and fencing trees, chopping scotch thistle and picking up trash along the river corridor, the volunteers were treated to lunch cooked by one of BLM Nevada's best Dutch-oven chefs, Elko Interagency Fire Center Supervisor Bill Roach.

-Mike Brown
Elko Field Office



BLM Volunteer Receives 2004 "Making a Difference" Award

Alvin McLane a volunteer for the Carson City Field Office was presented the award at a special ceremony at the U.S. Department of the Interior's historic South Penthouse in Washington, D.C. in June.

McLane has recorded more than 120 separate cultural sites, including petroglyphs, rock rings and lithic scatters in the Dry Lake area of northwestern Nevada. Each site is documented with a Global Positioning System record, a site



PHOTO BY MIKE HUNTER

form and a datum point photo reference. Last year McLane helped the Nevada Rock Art Foundation start a full-scale monitoring program at Dry Lake. Each month, six to eight volunteers assist with the monitoring program. McLane is now considered to be Nevada's leading rock art recorder. He is one of the original members of Am-Arcs, a local non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of Nevada's archaeology and Native American prehistory.

Through Am-Arcs, McLane is training site monitors and recorders to continue his legacy of cultural resource preservation.

National Public Lands Day



On Saturday, Sept. 18, thousands of volunteers across America will build trails, plant trees and clean up trash on their public lands. National Public Lands Day is coordinated by the National Environmental Education and Training Foundation and sponsored by Toyota. This year volunteers will receive a fee-free coupon to use during the year at any public land site managed by Federal agencies.

BLM Nevada will host six events:

Carson City: Faye-Luther Canyon trail construction to link the Jobs Peak Ranch Trailhead to the Faye-Luther Canyon Trailhead. Interpretive signs and trail markers will be installed.

Contact: Mark Struble, 775-885-6107 or Mark_Struble@nv.blm.gov.

Battle Mountain: Mill Creek campground interpretive trail and footbridge.

Contact: Diane Hendry, 775-635-4163 or Diane_Hendry@nv.blm.gov.

Las Vegas: Sloan Canyon clean up.

Contact: Kirsten Cannon, 702-515-5057 or Kirsten_Cannon@nv.blm.gov.

Note: The Sloan Canyon NPLD will be held a week later on Saturday, Sept. 25.

Ely: The CCC Ranch projects include planting willows, retrofitting a wildlife guzzler, removing fence, install a kiosk and clean up trash at Commins Lake.

Contact: Chris Hanefeld, 775-289-1842 or Chris_Hanefeld@nv.blm.gov.

Caliente: Cathedral Gorge State Park tree and landscape planting.

Contact: Chris Hanefeld, 775-289-1842 or Chris_Hanefeld@nv.blm.gov.

Note: The Caliente NPLD will be held a week later on Saturday, Sept. 25.

Winnemucca: Will host two events, the Porter Springs clean up near Lovelock, and the Soldier Meadows Hot Springs camp area, vehicle barriers rehabilitate impacted areas and place interpretive signs.

Contact: Jamie Thompson, 775-623-1541 or Jamie_Thompson@nv.blm.gov.

-Mike Brown,
Elko Field Office

Wilson Reservoir Gets New Dock

A new fishing dock has been installed at Wilson Reservoir Recreation Site about 83 miles northwest of Elko. The dock is 40 feet long and 8 feet wide.

It was built through a partnership between the BLM and the Nevada Department of Wildlife. The site offers 15 camping units with tables and fire rings, vault toilets, central garbage service, water and a double lane boat ramp.

Fees for camping are \$4 per vehicle per day and the boat ramp fee is \$2 per visit. There is a \$2 per vehicle fee for day use which includes using the new fishing dock. All of the fees collected at the site are retained locally to be reinvested back into the site. BLM is seeking 20 percent matching funds for a future project to build boat docks at the boat ramp.



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